March …, 2021

The Honorable …

United States Senator for …

Suite SR-…

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator …,

We are writing as members of the Karen Organization of America (KOA) to ask you to support Senate Resolution number 35 introduced by Senator Cardin and Senator Young condemning the February 1, 2021 military coup in Burma (Myanmar) and calling for action to help bring about peace and democracy in Myanmar.

We are watching in horror as the military junta that came to power through the military coup viciously attacks the unarmed civilian population of Burma, our birth country. Every day, more and more civilians are killed as they engage in peaceful protest or simply shelter in their homes.

Right now, in northern Karen State more than 6,000 villagers, including many children, are hiding in the jungle following unprovoked attacks by the Burmese military since December 2020. The indiscriminate targeting of civilians and the obstruction of humanitarian assistance are war crimes under the Geneva Conventions.

The suffering of the Karen people is two-fold. In Burmese government-controlled areas, ten years of partial democracy after five decades of military dictatorship have come to an abrupt end. General Ne Win staged the first military coup in 1962, and it was not until 2011 that the military gave up some of its power, allowing the formation of a quasi-civilian government following openly contested elections. In November 2020, general elections were held for a third time, but many of those elected were abducted by the junta at the time of the coup, and the new Parliament was never allowed to meet. Since then, those living in Burmese government-controlled areas are subject to repression by so-called “security” forces and attacks by thugs hired by the junta. At night these forces enter homes to arrest people or shoot indiscriminately into houses. The junta has changed laws to deny protections of basic civil rights.

Outside of Burmese government-controlled areas, nine years of partial peace after more than six decades of civil war have also come to an abrupt end. Since 1948, when the government of newly-independent Burma refused to recognize the rights of the Karen people, the Karen people have been engaged in a civil war with the Burmese Army – one of the longest running civil wars in the world. More than 100,000 Karen refugees ended up in refugee camps, and many have since been resettled to the United States. In 2012, ceasefires resulted in an uneasy peace. But two months before the coup, the Burmese Army again launched offenses in Karen State, forcing thousands of Karen people to flee from their villages.

At the root of the current crisis is the repression of ethnic peoples in Burma and the 2008 Constitution drafted by the Burmese military that ensures military control of the country and denies the rights of ethnic peoples. It is necessary not only to reverse the February 1 coup, but also to replace the Constitution with one that establishes true federal democracy and to end the war against the Karen and other peoples.

The Karen and other peoples of Burma are doing everything they can to resist the Burmese Army and return the country to civilian rule. They desperately need the the help of the international community to help stop the bloodshed and pressure the Burmese military to relinquish power. Displaced people fleeing Burmese Army offenses also are in urgent need of humanitarian support.

As leader of the free world, we hope that the United States can lead other countries in applying pressure on the military junta in Burma, supporting the resistance against the coup, providing cross-border humanitarian aid to reach those displaced by war, and supporting constitutional reform. Passing Senate Resolution number 35 would go a long way in this direction and we hope that you will support it.

As Karen Americans, we urge you to do everything you can to help the Karen people and other peoples of Burma in this dark time.

Respectfully,